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THE FIRST DANGER:

A DISCOURSE

BEFORE THE

General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church

BY APPOINTMENT

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BY THE

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THE FIRST DANGER.

"MY PEOPLE ARE DESTROYED FOR LACK OF KNOWLEDGE....."

HOSEA iv. 6.

CENTURIES ago, long before the Advent, appeared in Israel a prophet, whose burden was the estrangement of his people from God. This, with the mode in which they might be restored to him from whom they had separated, occupied him, to the exclusion of everything else. He is reckoned first of the minor prophets. He was eminently a national prophet. Abrupt, nervous, and incoherent, his sentences are, at the same time, earnest, significant, and often beautiful. Underneath his disjointed metaphors, his sudden transitions, his idiomatic peculiarities, his rude sentences, and his irregular rhythm, flows a full, though not always transparent, stream, or, perhaps one should say, torrent of thought. It is a current which often startles, by its swiftness, and force, and power. Coeval with Isaiah, and nearly so with Joel, his prophecy is, in many particulars, unlike theirs; but specially in respect of the peculiarity already named. His thoughts are confined, as theirs are not, to his own country. So

restricted, they are altogether painful at first. And though toward the close they change, and that which began in sorrow, ends in exultation—terminates in one of the sweetest and most pleasing of the prophetic perorations—one does not quite lose the impression of sadness produced by the earlier sentences of his prophecy.

Of these, not the least striking is that we have cited as our point of departure in the present discourse. Its adaptedness to the time and the occasion will be manifest, we trust, fathers and brethren, venerable and beloved, ere we have done. It indicated to the chosen people the danger they were in. They were not, in fact, deserted of Heaven, though it is certainly said, “My people are destroyed.” God still sent prophets to reprove and reclaim them. He had not yet ejected from their possessions or overwhelmed them with calamity. They were said to be destroyed, because they were threatened with destruction; because of the certainty of it, and this, through lack of knowledge; in the people, ignorant of the will of God, and so devoid of fear or reverence of him—an ignorance ripening to a fatal result—or in the priests, who instructed them falsely, opening the way to superstition and idolatry, which invite a visitation of the Divine judgments.

They were then in extreme danger. They were so, through lack of knowledge—of religious knowledge. Of all sources of peril to the body politic, this was chief; was, in truth, the door through which all other

causes of alarm entered. There needed no other, to utterly waste, and finally destroy them. One thing had saved them, viz. knowledge of God, of his law, of his providences, of his government, of his revealed purposes and plans—such knowledge, held not as a theory merely, but as a matter of experience.

Now, though ages intervene between ourselves and them, the transition, in this connection, from thoughts of them to thoughts of ourselves, is facile. There is a striking analogy between their case and ours. That analogy is not in signs favourable, for such were not left to them, but in signs unfavourable—portents of gloom, and indications of coming evil. For, to us, with all the evidences of external prosperity, and the abounding intelligence of the people, the vast spirit of enterprise, and the exuberance of wealth, and the wonderful growth of this, among the youngest of the nations, there are such portents and indications.

As a nation, we also are in peril. As with them, so with us, one cause is operating a fatal result. There is but one preventive. One thing only can effectually counteract that cause, and forestall its effect. Moreover, it is of this we have come to speak.

Nor think, fathers and brethren, that, in discoursing to you of THE FIRST DANGER, considered from this level, we have lost out of mind the church *in* the nation, or the multitude of souls composing it, each of more value than all the “thrones, dominations, principedoms”—of more worth than the most glorious civil heritage beneath the bending sky. Only grant liberty to regard

such theme as suited to the occasion, and we have heart to proceed.

I. But the chief danger—what? Not what is many times supposed. To most of the reflecting, there is in the air “*susurrus grave*”—the hoarse whisper perplexing them

“—— with the dread of change”——

but, not all are agreed as to its origin and purport. We seem—nor is it, by any means, an absurd and vagrant fancy—to be drifting away upon an uncertain sea, on what rocks to strike, or on what shore to be thrown like a stranded ship, and as fuel, fit only for the burning, is known to Omniscience alone. There seem causes at work, many of them silently, whose ultimate result, if their operation is not checked, can be no other than a dissolution of the forces which now hold hold us together, and the destruction of all our hopes. So that, if things go on as they are now going, with no efficient remedy interposed, only disaster awaits us. The joints of social order will be loosened, and all go down in a vortex of revolution, terror, and crime. But there is a wide diversity of sentiment as to which of the causes, thus operative, is chief, and most to be deprecated.

1. Some, we observe, fear most the rapid growth and influence of political animosities and partisanship; but the vision of such is certainly obstructed. That here is an evil cannot be denied. Who esteems his party above his country, and is blinded by consideration for the first, to that which will best promote the welfare

of the last, is scarcely a patriot. Let no such man be trusted. But this is not *our* fear. However it may be with ambitious aspirants or unprincipled demagogues, who seek only their own advantage, we trust the masses are not yet infected by a plague so foul. Patriotism is not so dead that it cannot counteract the influence of a cause like this. We have already weathered many a gale, raised by the action, by the contact and conflict of such animosities, and shall outlive many more.

2. Others, we perceive, regard with pain, existent sectional jealousies, some of which seem unavoidably incident to a nation of men circumstanced as we are, while others are roused by the rashness, or selfishness, or thoughtlessness—or it may be Pharisaism, or pride of different sections—regard them with pain, as if they were preparing the way for changes, fraught only with disaster. That their existence is to be regretted, we cannot deny. We would there might be everywhere more of a spirit of forbearance. We tremble when we hear threatening words often uttered, and sentiments which bode only evil. We cannot persuade ourselves that words, so oft and deliberately spoken, are not prompted by a thought or wish deliberately cherished, and waiting only a favourable moment to be embodied in action. Still, this evil is light compared with another of which we will presently speak. Beside, we hope these jealousies are confined to the minority. Even where they exist, it needs only the pressure of a common calamity, or the presence of some common enemy,

to lay them; as the spirit of faction in the Eternal City was dissipated when the illustrious Carthaginian thundered at her gates.

3. Others, still, are greatly alarmed at the extraordinary tendency to personal liberty, existing among us—to liberty, not always accordant to law, but maintained, if need be, above and over law; a tendency developed in two ways—(1) in insurrection against law; and (2) in the summary execution of law, in obedience to popular clamour. We believe that this tendency to personal freedom, without reference to law, is with us the epidemic of the day. If not introduced, it has been aggravated by the coming to us of many, once accustomed to harsh restraints and despotic rule, but who are now summoned to exercise the rights of freemen. From this tendency result secret murders, riots, assaults in high places and in low—assassinations, mobs, and other symptoms of approaching anarchy or barbarism. It is, then, a ground of alarm; for “the law”—the saying is Lord Clarendon’s—“is the standard and guardian of our liberty; it circumscribes and defends it; but to imagine liberty without law”—it is of the tendency to this of which we speak—“is to imagine every man with a sword in his hand, to destroy him who is weaker than himself.” It is then, as we said, ground of alarm; for it should never be forgotten, that while insurrections against arbitrary power tend to liberty, insurrections against law tend to despotism; and that all the tendencies of a republic are to the deterioration of efficient government, from the mutinous

encroachments of the popular will upon law. But this is not our first danger.

4. Still others, not without reason, apprehend much from the influence of that ecclesiastical system, which has its name from Rome. To not a few, it is the most alarming thing. But we confess greater fear of a prevalent indifferentism. Here is a more real danger. Guarding against this, we erect a barricade against the other. If unobservant or indifferent to this, nothing ought to save us. If we are to become a nation of indifferent and thoughtless men, with no respect for the Bible—no regard for the Sabbath—no interest in the ordinances of Christianity—no fear of, or belief in a self-revealed and personal God—a predestinating and overruling God—we need not be concerned about Romanism. In such case, Romanism, undesirable as it is, would come to us as a blessing. So of various other causes, operating, within their sphere, unfavourable results, but which it needs not to name—they are not chief.

II. The first, to recall a phrase just spoken, is Indifferentism—or, to use one more familiar and comprehensive—Scepticism. In this is sufficient ground of solicitude without thinking of others. Moreover, in discoursing of it we are the more anxious that you follow the train of thought to be drawn out, because we perceive the public mind many times so engrossed with other dangers as to lose sight of this, operating more stealthily and disastrously than any other. Thus we

seem like an army of men, centre and wings, moving on a single battery, or a solitary park of ordnance, to silence them, though only a reserve of the enemy, while the whole plain around is full of gathering squadrons, unseen, moving to the attack, or all the ground beneath, is hollow with mines just ready to be sprung, but of which we have no thought.

The first danger, we repeat, is Scepticism. It outranks, as it antedates, all others. It is a system of negations, assuming for itself various shapes. Now, it is the philosophic unbelief of Hume, practically, though by many unintelligently cherished, but not without effect. Again, it is the less philosophic, but not less dangerous, creed of Voltaire, or that of the author of "The Age of Reason." Again, it is the diluted, maudlin sentimentalism of Rousseau. Again, it is the mythic theorizing of Strauss, or Froude, or Newman, or Parker, or the physicalism of the most positive of French philosophers.* It is any of these popularized and adapted to the masses. Or, more explicitly, and without reference to names who may be regarded as its representative men, it appears in the form, now, of denial of the Divine Existence, or absolute Atheism; now, in that of denial of the Divine Personality, or Pantheism; again, in that of denial of the Divine Providential Government, or Naturalism; now, in that of denial of the Divine Moral Government, with doctrines related to it, as of the fall, redemption, and others cognate and collateral, or Rationalism; and again, as denial of Human responsibility, or Indifferentism.

* *Compte.*

In the three last named forms, viz. as Naturalism, Rationalism, and Indifferentism, it is most to be feared in its influence upon the popular mind. In these it is most insidious, most adaptive—makes its way most easily among the masses, permeating their minds, and fixing their habits of thought. Sometimes issuing from the schools under the wing of science; arraying God's works against his word; setting the testimony of the rocks against the testimony of their Creator;

“——— some drill and bore
The solid earth, and from the strata there,
Extract a register, by which they learn
That He who made it, and revealed its date
To Moses, was mistaken in its age;”

repeating itself in the conversations of the learned; staring boldly out from many a treatise on Cosmogony and Ethnology; not undetected in discourses, Ontological, Psychological, Sociological; not always wanting in treatises exegetical, for not seldom is the purpose cherished and the effort made to set God's word in opposition to itself; underlying theories of reform; flowing down the stream of literature; personing the poem, the story and the essay; speaking through its *Westminster Reviews* and *Atlantic Monthlies*, and a host of other periodicals, some more, some less specious and insinuating. At other times expressing itself upon the platform or at the anniversary; making itself heard in the popular lecture, or in the speeches of men, half fanatical and half—something else; while, as Rationalism and Indifferentism, it subsidizes even the pulpit,

and finds willing advocates in Unitarian, and other professed teachers of Christianity. From such sources it is diffused abroad. Were it confined to the few it were not so dangerous. But it is not, nor can be. The few think for the many. In most instances, theories are accepted by most on trust. Hence the negatory false creed of Scepticism, coming out from the schools or from scholars; from coteries of Encyclopedists or from essayists and magazine writers, goes by such vehicles as the press, the platform, and the pulpit, to whomsoever will receive it. Coming from whatever source, it is diffused abroad, an atmosphere of contagion. As water poured in volume from the clouds upon the mountain side will flow down to cover the plain, so this descends from one social and intellectual strata to another, till the lowest feels its deadly chill.

It is of the nature of error to flow, and faster than truth. "Falsehood," said Luther, "travels leagues, while truth is binding on her sandals." At all events it travels—it never rests, till overtaken, overborne, and crushed. Thus, all error, whether on the side of superstition or on that of infidelity. And what, unhappily, in this instance, makes its progress more easy and sure, is, that it comes with its demands upon their credulity, to men predisposed to it, as all naturally are; comes to a population, mixed, heterogeneous, peculiar, and most impatient of direction or restraint; comes to a people swelling with pride, and having vast confidence in its own power of discrimination; to a state of society on which is cast loose "a larger proportion of educated

intellect than ever before existed in any community; a greater mass which must needs be influenced, and when influenced either way, correspondingly powerful; a mass, stimulated, throughout every portion of it, to a degree never witnessed before in any age of the world;" but unfortunately more readily influenced to the wrong than to the right.

It should be remarked somewhere, to avoid misapprehension, and perhaps as well here as elsewhere, that in naming skepticism in a general way, though with special thought of a particular form or forms of it, as the first danger, we do not mean that the peril is in their being embraced as clearly defined theories. They may not be. There may be few in whose minds they will assume definite form or shape, resting on definite reasons, and holding definite relations to other theories. The danger is rather in results of their practical development in the disposition, conduct, and life. Indifferentism—*e. g.*, the denial of human responsibility—which is among the most prevalent forms of infidelity, is bad enough, held theoretically, and fraught with the worst possible consequences to the individual; but chiefly when it enters into the conduct, and comes boldly out in the life, is it most dangerous to society, in its relation to which we are now considering it. So of other, and of all the Protean shapes of unbelief. Unknown to the majority by name, unappreciated as theories, the influence of these forms flows down upon them from some source not distinctly recognized or sought after; swaying them as the feeble are swayed;

leading them as the blind are led—so multiplying signs of evil, increasing and aggravating symptoms premonitory of decay, that no patriot or Christian can observe without pain.

As matter of fact and of observation, how much of such influence is there already at work! How much is there of practical denial of Divine Providence, or Naturalism! How many, in this scoffing age, say in their hearts, “What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have if we pray unto him?” How much is there of practical denial of the Divine moral government, or Rationalism! How many make void the law, deny a vicarious atonement, sneer at the doctrine of putative guilt and righteousness! How many, who, if they have not the hardihood to say, with the Neologist of the “modern Athens,”* “Christ suffered for his own sins, not for ours,” do persuade themselves, nevertheless, that they have none for which he needed to die! How much is there—more than we can estimate—of *practical* denial of human responsibility, or Indifferentism! How many virtually say, “Doth God see?—doth God regard?—doth God care?—can our acts reach him?—does he concern himself to mark them?—He our final Judge and Rewarder!—say, rather, our indulgent Father and Friend evermore! We repeat, how widely and industriously is disbelief at work! And if it continue to work; if it grow bolder—as it will—in proportion as the number of its adherents increases, or its principles are avowed,

* See Theodore Parker’s “Discourse of Religion.”

what will the end be? For, in addition to the fact that it finds the human heart everywhere predisposed to it, consider how peculiar is the field of its operation here; how many aids it finds in the unusual character of our population. Let it be remembered that society is here in a formative stage; that the settled character of it remains to be determined; and that this aims to cut the only ligature that binds society to God. In truth, we are—to borrow a term of the geologist—in a condition of transition; but whether from good to better, or from bad to worse, let him decide who knows. That must depend upon the character of influences brought to bear upon the multitude; whether those influences be humanizing, enlightening, ennobling, as of religion; or demoralizing, degrading, barbarizing, as of irreligion.

What is to be the result, on national character, of the mingling of races—Latin, Teutonic, Celtic, Saxon, Slavonic—coming together from other lands, accustomed to diverse languages, laws, creeds, customs, manners, with every variety of habit, prejudice, thought—this alone is a question of vast interest and significance. Who predicts, that except for some healthful influence, as of the gospel, there will not be retrogression, even in respect of our social condition? What is to bind these together, in pursuit of any common good? What is to forbid the general interest, to be overlaid by the individual? What is to subdue the national antipathies and prejudices, thus brought in conjunction? But, especially, what is to prevent, that they lapse—all

former restraint thrown off—into a state of undisguised atheism? This, especially in the newer settlements, and partly, from the very character of the emigration itself. For that is not like the migration of the Huguenots from France to Switzerland and Germany, to England and Holland; not, like that of the Puritans from Holland to Plymouth, of a religious character; but is instigated by motives of mere personal interest, or love of adventure. Nor is it of a homogeneous and intelligent character, like that from England to Virginia. With the enterprising, go also the indolent; the ignorant keep company with the educated; the rude-minded and cultivated move on to the same destination; men of all habits, inclinations, purposes, character, religions, nations—pouring along, like tidal waves of the ocean, a restless, rolling flood, to occupy the immense domain now open to them. The ultimate result—what? As a theatre, for the operation of all the powers of evil, how stupendous! And then, just now, how fitted to the hand of such powers! For, the plastic formative stage, is it not in that, society receives the impressions which are ineffaceable and permanent? Is it not, ordinarily, moulded and shaped by the influences which first bear upon it?

III. But leaving this, for the present, let us, out of the sea of generalities, over which we have been passing, draw certain particulars, illustrating the mode of operation of the evil spirit of Disbelief. Let us observe

how it begins already to be self-revealed. We shall thus perceive more clearly the evil it threatens.

Consider here, then, at the outset, the increasing disregard of the INSTITUTES OF RELIGION. Think how unobservant of these the people are gradually becoming. The Church, the Christian Sabbath, the Holy Scriptures, how are they falling into disesteem and neglect! But, neglect of them prevails, in proportion as infidelity thrives; and universal disregard of these, must sooner or later prove fatal. It can do no other. So surely as cold chills, or fire burns, this will waste and destroy. It is its nature so to do. Now, as matter of fact, what do we observe? Who does not perceive growing indifference in respect of

1. THE CHURCH. While on the one hand, and to a limited extent, there is devotion to some form of organization ecclesiastic, which substitutes churchmanship for Christianity, and which has ignorance or bigotry to its mother—on the other hand, and to how wide an extent, is there utter unconcern, whether there be any church whatsoever? In how many instances does neglect amount to positive opposition? By how many are its services neglected, its ordinances contemned, its ministers despised? How many organizations are already arrayed against it? How much of hostility is cherished by many, under the influence of an evil disposition? In some of our cities, even children are taught to utter curses against the Church of God; are systematically instructed to sneer at whatever proceeds from it, or is associated with it. Even

where wickedness does not rise to such a pitch of unblushing and open audacity, how many thousands upon thousands, all over the land—a host constantly augmenting—desert the service of the sanctuary, turn away from the Church, and all the advantages it offers, and the blessings it carries, as the sacred ark once carried the manna potted in gold, and the Aaronic rod, and the tables of the covenant? We do not stay to prove these assertions—to certify them, by appeals to statistic and other tables. The simple, but great disparity between the actual, though perhaps not felt, necessities of the people, and the inadequate supply, justifies all we have said. But, such neglect of the Church, whether it come of deliberation and aversion, or destitution, can work for us only disastrous results. No nation of freemen can long continue such, in the absence of the ordinances of religion. And what we have to fear from the prevalence of sceptical notions, is, that the altars of religion will be completely overturned and thrown down, its sacred places converted to unhallowed uses, its teachings discredited, its ordinances more bitterly contemned, and its ministers, in the public estimation, utterly degraded.

What has just been said of neglect of the Church, is true also, *mutato nomine*, of

2. THE SABBATH. If anything is certainly true, then is this—that in proportion as any people, once enlightened, disregard the Divine command to sanctify the Sabbath, they cast a shadow upon their future. Never was England's horoscope fuller of signs portentous of

coming ill, than when ambitious and unprincipled Archbishop Laud induced his master to republish the royal declaration of 1618, concerning Sunday sports. The Sabbath gone, and our glory fades, like the dissolving views in a kaleidoscope; our prosperity ends as a dream ends when one awakes. Then, farewell—a long farewell to all our greatness!

In a nation of men self-governed, so much depends on moral culture and influence; so much on the enlightening and quickening of the public conscience—enlightening it to prevent crude and hasty action, or violation of right by mistake; quickening it to prevent such violation by intention—neither of which can be effectually done without such an institution as the Sabbath, with its holy influences—that the act, by which the Sabbath should be abrogated, would be fatal. To it the most perfect order in society is due. Where it has not been fostered, the nearest approach to such order has been a very imperfect and comparatively transient quiet. Doubtless a certain kind of order you may have without it. It is truthfully said, “Let the forces of despotism be well organized, and everything be subject to minute inspection, and a certain formal and unproductive order—the order of stagnation and death—may be preserved all the better for the absence of that general culture and elevation which fits men for freedom.” But a free government, in the last analysis, is self-government. It is simply because men will preserve order, and respect the rights of others, of their own accord, that they do not need soldiers to govern

them. But, if external force be removed, there is no ground of security, but the power of that invisible and eternal law which reveals itself in the conscience, and makes every man a law unto himself; make this its key-stone, and the arch will not only support itself, but the more it is pressed, the firmer it will be. Hence, everything that weakens moral restraint, tends to subvert free institutions; and hence we affirm that such institutions cannot be sustained without the Sabbath.

Now, you instantly apprehend the ground of our fear in this direction. Infidelity is, of course, opposed to the Sabbath. Not only does it, as Coleridge says,

“————— still promising
Freedom, itself too sensual to be free,
Poison life's amities, and cheat the soul
Of faith and quiet hope, and all that lifts,
And all that soothes the spirit,”

but it aims to blast an institution which does more for our protection than a million bayonets, or all the *gendarmarie* of power. Our fear is, lest, through its influence, the key-stone of the arch be displaced in spite of all efforts to keep it in position. Compare, we pray you, the condition of things with reference to this particular, in the present year of grace, with the state of things one-third or half a century gone. Let no lines of latitude or longitude limit your comparison, and you will come to the conclusion that the increase of Sabbath desecration is appalling, and, if not arrested—combining, as it does, with other elements of corrosion

and waste—will indirectly, indeed, but surely undermine all our foundations.

We go on to remark the influence of prevalent scepticism in the growing neglect of

3. THE HOLY SCRIPTURES; the neglect of these as a rule of faith. The ultimate result of this, it requires no seer to foretell. If the Sabbath is the key-stone, the Word of God is the corner-stone; this gone, and with it goes the other. Both gone, and then goes all moral restraint; then fades away the power of that invisible and eternal law which is revealed in the conscience, making every man a law unto himself.

A man's rule of practice corresponds to his rule of faith—it is not higher. Hence, take away the Scriptures, or permit them to be disregarded, and no rule is left as a guaranty of our safety. If the Bible, as a rule, is abrogated, the rule will be at best morality, or respect for the opinion of others. This *might* serve for a time—that is, so long as men would observe it. But what is to save and prolong the rule? How long will it retain its force, the Scriptures once ignored?

It may be, some of us know little of the organized movements set afoot—are not aware of the systematic efforts made, in various quarters, to disparage the Scriptures, and bring them into disrepute. If so, we shall fail to comprehend the danger from this source. It may be, our attention is turned in another direction; and yet, the careful reader of none but secular journals must be impressed with the idea, that the Bible is gradually losing its supremacy over the popular mind.

He may learn from them, that many are not content to indulge their own unfavourable opinion of Divine revelation in the Scriptures, but are disposed to create or support organizations for the promulgation of their views. So, scepticism stands no longer on the defensive merely, but becomes aggressive, and invasive; and, like the apocalyptic beast of seven heads and more horns, commences to push and force its way, on system and openly. Thousands accept its doctrines; thousands more, who hesitate to accept, are shaken by them, until, in pain, we ask ourselves, "The end of this—what will it be?" Are we to be utterly destroyed by it? Are we to have, in fact, in this western hemisphere, what we now have in literature, a Kosmos without Christianity?

It gratifies, indeed, but does not satisfy, to know, that extraordinary efforts are made in opposition, for, if they are not too late, they seem scarcely proportioned to the emergency. Despite all the efforts made, neglect of the Scriptures, and rejection of their teachings, grows, especially among such as live in the newer settlements, and in the wilderness, as if they had been led out thence to be thus tempted of the Devil. The evil increases, not among such only, but rapidly among them nevertheless. The danger is in this, not that the Bible is not had, or to be had, but had is neglected.

4. Does it need to detain you, fathers and brethren, to speak in the next place of the influence of scepticism in the growing disregard of the PRECEPTS AND COMMANDS OF RELIGION? Does not such

neglect follow the last as a matter of course? Does it not follow as naturally as darkness follows the setting of the sun? To all such precepts and commands, infidelity is at heart opposed. If it make a show of observing some of them, we distrust the show, we cannot confide in its honesty. Most of them, however, it absolutely rejects. Thus, it throws wide the door for the entrance of ambition, and selfishness, and official corruption, and private cupidity, and immorality, and crime. It fosters, immeasurably, that tendency to personal liberty, of which we have spoken, which makes men restive under restraint of wisest and least partial and best of laws. This, especially in the newer settlements, where the salutary checks of society are to a great degree unknown, among men, whose tastes grow wild, and their resentments violent, and their enjoyments coarse, and their tempers passionate, and their dispositions vengeful, in proportion as they recede from the older settlements, and are secluded from the influence of an older civilization, or grow up in ignorance, and in the absence of the restraining, chastening, humanizing influence of the gospel.

How all this may seem to others, we cannot tell. It may be, they apprehend more from other causes. Then, we have only to crave their indulgence if we cannot. Other causes may, indeed, operate a bad result, while this operates a worse. It is in the power of party strife, and sectional jealousies, and unhallowed ambition, and dominating supreme selfishness, to sunder and divide

us. It is in the power of this to sunder, divide, and destroy. The institutes of religion are the strongest of all the ligatures which bind us together, and practical regard of its precepts, the sole condition on which our safety can be assured. Whatever interferes with these, sets us at once in a position of peril. Hence, observing the tendency and working of scepticism, we are constrained to place it in front of all the evils which threaten us. It is the meteor in the political heavens which casts the most baleful light. It is the moral pestilence, walking in darkness through the land, and marshalling all the rest. It is the dreadful sirocco, sweeping the face of the country, inducing fatal moral prostration wherever it comes. It is the darkest cloud above us, stretching from the eastern sky to the western, shrouding all the empyrean with its heavy folds.

IV. And yet, we are not without hope. But our hope is in nought that does not recognize the necessity of influences not of earth. If our confederacy is to be preserved, it must be through higher than any mere human power. Whatever human instrumentality is employed, the power must be of God. If the foundations are to be established and strengthened, it must be done, not by the philosopher—not by the politician—not even by the statesmen, but by the Christian—it can be done only by the diffusion of religious knowledge, with the blessing of God accompanying it—can be done only by the diffusion of such knowledge, and that in, the main, through the agency of an active

church and an enlightened and devoted ministry. An active church, that is, one which leaves no talent unemployed; which has every member afield, and labouring according to his strength and prayerfully for Christ and the truth; distributing everywhere the Scriptures; employing such agencies as the Sunday-school, the tract and the religious newspaper; and a ministry self-denying, watchful, continually putting the people in remembrance of their duties and obligations, and sowing broadcast the good seed of doctrine; enjoining and encouraging the culture of family religion; always studying how best to promote the welfare of society, and save souls unto the thrones of Heaven. If, aside from this, there is on earth any agency which can save this great nation, make it a nation of freemen, self-governed, and yielding universal and willing obedience to simple law; and, which is better than all, a religious nation, bearing all manner of fruit of virtue, and an example to mankind of the ennobling power of righteousness, and a simple child-like faith—if there is any other agency, we repeat, which will do this, we have yet to learn what that agency is.

What course then to pursue? What measures to adopt? What to do, as good citizens and Christian men? Failing to reach and exhaust the sources of the evil of which we have discoursed, what to do to turn its current and counteract the flood? Precisely what, in the name of God, we are doing, only with augmented zeal and energy. Precisely, what our noble Presbyterian Church is doing, in training young

men for the holy ministry; in erecting churches in which they may stand and assert and defend the truth; in furnishing them auxiliaries in the printed page; and last, though not least, in aiding in their maintenance, while they devote themselves to their appropriate work, in the diffusion of religious knowledge, both doctrinal and practical, and in every way possible. To such work, especially among the destitute, God in his providence summons us. For it he has eminently qualified us. No branch of the Church Apostolic is more richly endowed with all needful qualifications than this. With a so scriptural, compact, complete, and uncorrupted system of doctrine; with a mode of worship so unostentatious and simple, yet reverent, and susceptible of adaptation to every variety of circumstance or season; with a polity so carefully drawn from the word of God; with a history that challenges our highest admiration and excites our warmest love; with an experience, in which her faith has been tried, and endured the test, from which she has come forth more beautiful in every feature, and stronger in every limb; with a ministry which need fear no comparison with another in intelligence, and devotion to its proper work; with numbers, by no means small, of the intellectual and influential, as well as the pious; and enjoying, as she does, so manifest tokens of the Divine favour, in the frequency and power of her revivals, how much ought she to accomplish in the name of her crucified, glorious Master and Head? How much—leaving out of mind, at present, others which have an equal claim upon her

consideration—through that one agency, on whose behalf this discourse is pronounced—whose solitary aim is, through the instrumentality of others, to preach the gospel, specially to the destitute and poor? How ought she to place within reach of this, her agent and servant, means, by which the sphere of its operations may be more rapidly enlarged; that it may send out its influence in advance of that other, so perilous; that it may maintain ground already secured, and occupy constantly new positions, and meet the wants of a population so immense, so rapidly multiplying and expanding, and even overflowing the old borders, arrested only by the western sea; till every city, and town, and district, shall have its minister; till the truth shall be preached in every valley and on every hill-top; till from Orient to Occident, from the river on the North to the Gulf, there shall be no inhabited place which does not echo the voice of him who, in the name of God, brings good tidings of good, and publishes peace; till there shall be no wilderness, where man is found, whose deep silence shall not be broken by the messages of Christ's ambassador; and thus, where it may be, an antidote administered to the Indifferentism, Naturalism, and practical Atheism, now or fast becoming so rife.

Surely, what is most needed, in every quarter, is the pure gospel, faithfully preached. It is this which is most needed, in every direction, but specially in those to which the eye of your Board of Domestic Missions is constantly turned. The gospel is the power of God. There is in it inherent virtue, to save the individual or

the nation which accepts it. It wins regard for the Church of God, and all its ordinances. It redeems the Sabbath from desecration, and surrounds it with influences potential for good. It makes the Scriptures, which contain it, to be respected. It causes that they, standing out as they do, in opposition to every form of error, be received as a rule of faith and practice. It enlightens, and quickens, and invigorates, the public conscience. It secures the enactment of wise and just laws, with impartial administration, and faithful execution of them. It impels obedience to them. It is a friend of education. It forbids only what is wrong, while it enjoins whatever is right, in all social human relations. In fine, it restrains the passions, illumines the understanding, corrects the will, fortifies the judgment, refines the soul, elevates and ennobles the man. Of the State, the religion of the gospel is the glory and the defence. It insures harmony in its counsels; infuses a spirit of patriotism into the hearts of the people; allays sectional animosities; teaches a lesson of charity, and of forbearance; weakens party strife; counteracts the plottings of the ambitious; silences the braying of demagogues; is a guard against extravagance which impoverishes, and luxury which enervates; is a bond of union in resistance to unjust aggression from without; is the crown of prosperity and peace; is the true remedy for all evils existent, and the most efficient preventive of all which threaten. It is the supernal sword-glare at the gate; the

“—— awful gnomon of red fire,”

which forbids the return of outcast evil.

And this, we repeat, this is to us the greatest want. We want it for the safety of the State, as well as for the salvation of souls. We want it, in counteraction of this gigantic spirit of scepticism, coming in as a flood. And were only we, as a Church, awake to the emergency of the case and time, how soon might this want be met! Were only the intelligence, the influence, the wealth of this one branch of the Church of Christ, consecrated as a whole to God, and subject alway to his demands, what a change would come! How would threatened danger disappear! How solid would be our peace! How settled our assurance of prosperity in the future! Then would there be no place, where the good tidings should not be proclaimed, that all might hear. Then, wherever Naturalism or Spiritualism, Indifferentism or Rationalism, False Doctrine, or Sceptical Folly, Fanaticism or practical Atheism, showed their sinister and distorted features, they should be instantly confronted; and, please Heaven, blasted by this power of God!

Then were we safe! Then were we safe, under the protection of Him "which by his strength setteth fast the mountains, being girded with power; which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people." Then, though the political heavens be darkened; though the waves of faction surge and toss, like great waves of the sea, when Euroclydon sweeps out from the East, would we outride every gale; for an invisible Hand is upon the helm—is around, above, beneath, and an unseen Spirit breathes

upon the sail—the hand and Spirit of the predestinating and overruling God!

May it be, and soon! May all evil influences be speedily checked! May the truth everywhere prevail, for the good of this nation and the glory of our God! But chiefly, O Jehovah! our father's God, and ours!—chiefly for the glory of thy adorable name! Do thou grant it—for the sake of Him “whom not having seen, we love!”

“Thou, therefore”—and surely none in this venerable court, but will join in the majestic and fervent prayer of Milton for the Commonwealth—“Thou, therefore, that sittest in light, and glory unapproachable! Parent of angels and men!—next, Thee I implore, Omnipotent King, Redeemer of that lost remnant whose nature thou didst assume, ineffable and everlasting Love!—and Thou, the third Subsistence of Divine Infinitude, illuminating Spirit, the joy and solace of created things! one Tri-personal Godhead! now unite us entirely, and appropriate us to thyself; tie us everlastingly in willing homage to the prerogative of thy eternal throne. Defeat the enemies of our peace, visible or invisible. Let them take counsel together, and let it come to nought; let them decree, and do thou cancel it; let them gather themselves, and be scattered; let them embattle themselves, and be broken; let them embattle, and be broken. Then, amidst the hymns and hallelujahs of saints, some one may, perhaps, be heard offering, at high strains, in new and lofty measures, to sing and celebrate thy Divine mercies, and marvellous

judgments in this land throughout all ages; whereby this great nation, instructed and united to the fervent and continual practice of truth and righteousness, and casting far from her the rags of her old vices, may press on hard, to that high and happy emulation, to be found the soberest, wisest, and most Christian people at that day, when thou, the eternal and shortly-expected King, shalt open the clouds to judge the several kingdoms of the world, and distributing national honours and rewards to religious and just Commonwealths, shall put an end to all earthly tyrannies, proclaiming thy universal and mild monarchy through heaven and earth; when they, undoubtedly, that by their labours, counsels, and prayers, have been earnest for the common good of religion and their country, shall receive, above the inferior orders of the blessed, the regal addition of principalities, legions, and thrones, unto their glorious titles, and in supereminence of beatific vision, progressing the dateless and inevoluble circle of eternity, shall clasp inseparable hands with joy and bliss, in overmeasure for ever!"

THE END.

